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## **Examining students' night-time activity spaces: identities, performances and transformations**

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### **Abstract**

It has become increasingly clear that social activities play an important role for many UK undergraduate students in informing identity and place attachment through interactions with their term-time location. While attention has been given to the ways in which students construct 'exclusive geographies' through self-segregation from non-students, there has, thus so far, been very little discussion of how students' identities may be affected by their changing activity spaces and how this may blur the boundaries between student and non-student spaces. Exploring these transformations over the duration of the degree is important as they highlight how identity performances may be influenced by students' transitions through University and their changing mobility patterns. This paper will address this by considering: (1) how first year activity spaces may constitute a student bubble for new undergraduates; (2) how, in subsequent years, these activity spaces adapt as students hone their social practices and explore environments less associated with

student-life, and (3) how 'local' student's activity spaces can become complex as they contemplate locating their multiple identities during term-time.

## **Keywords**

Students, higher education, identity, geography, activity space, night-time socialising

## **Introduction**

Much consideration has been given in recent years to the ways in which undergraduate students engage with 'spaces of education' (Smith et al., 2014), such as learning environments (Reay et al., 2010), Student's Unions (Brooks et al., 2015), sports societies (Smith, 2004), halls of residences (Holton, 2016), shared housing (Smith and Holt, 2007) and night-time socialising (Chatterton, 1999). These spaces, in many ways constitute a 'student bubble', whereby the constituent parts of students' activity spaces merge together to create a seemingly homogenous student identity. It is often implied within both the popular and academic literature that such homogeneity exacerbates tensions between student and non-student citizens, through incivility (Holt and Griffin, 2005), antisocial behaviour (Hubbard, 2013) and self-segregation (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003), culminating in what Chatterton (1999) terms 'exclusive geographies', in which students separate away from their host communities. While work has examined students' activity spaces in terms of day-time activities (e.g. Crozier et al., 2008), this paper will explore specifically how students consider their night-time activity spaces to examine more critically these notions of exclusivity and how, through night-time socialising, students' activity spaces may begin to merge with those of non-students.

Chatterton and Hollands (2003) refer to University towns and cities as 'studentland' where the 'student pound' is capable of drawing in businesses and services into neighbourhoods which would otherwise not have come. This is particularly pertinent as students have been

thought to account for approximately ten per cent of a University location's economic activity (Swinney, 2010). These complex forms of commodification within University locations mean that students have increasingly been portrayed as powerful commodifiers (Chatterton, 1999; Gibson, 2002), or 'apprentice' gentrifiers (Smith and Holt, 2007). Whilst much of this increased economic activity stems from productivity, skills and innovation, the city as a place for consumption, specifically through night-time socialising, plays a particularly significant role in stimulating economic growth. For example, the Student Income and Expenditure Survey (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2013) estimated that 'entertainment' made up sixteen per cent of a full time UK undergraduate student's average annual spend in 2011/12. This comprised £420 (43.5 per cent) on alcohol consumed outside of the house, £122 (12.7 per cent) on sports, hobbies, clubs and societies, £122 (16 per cent) on entrance fees to nightclubs and £108 (11.2 per cent) on alcohol for consumption at home<sup>1</sup>. What these figures suggest is that while students outlay significant amounts of money on entertainment, the emphasis on alcohol expenditure highlights the important role night-time socialising plays for many students in forming place attachment through interactions with their term-time location.

Hägerstrand's (1970) understanding of activity spaces will be useful in examining these issues, particularly in observing the ways in which students' mental maps of their term-time location may be affected by their changing tastes for night-time social activities. Golledge and Stimson (1997) suggest that activity space is the confluence of which all of a person's daily activities occur. They comprise movement to and from the home, regular activity locations (e.g. work, school etc.) and the movements in and around these activities. What is important here is that such activity spaces are vital for our understandings of and attachments to locations which can build and develop over time. Hence, understanding the flexibility of students' activity spaces will extend previous research by examining notions of

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<sup>1</sup> This figure also includes £160 (16.6 per cent) spent on household items and electronics worth over £50.

how UK HE students use night-time social activities as tools for [re]negotiating their identities as they transition through University. While Chatterton (1999) suggests that first year students may cluster in groups to “learn the rules of the student game” (p. 120), Hollands (1995) and Chatterton and Hollands (2002) suggest that second and third year students can become experimental with their socialising in order to ‘unlearn’ these rules and develop more individual identities. This research will critique this by examining the spaces in which students socialise in order to provide a link between how students modify their social behaviour year on year and the coping mechanisms used by the participants as they considered their journeys through University. The rest of this paper will be divided into seven sections. The following two sections will explore the literature pertaining to the geographies of youthful identities and student’s night-time social spaces. After describing the methods, sections five, six and seven will observe (1) how the first year may constitute a student bubble for new undergraduates; (2) how social practices adapt as students move into subsequent years and (3) how ‘local’ students locate their multiple identities during term-time. The final section will conclude by examining how these notions of student identities contribute to wider discussions of the geographies of students.

## **Youth identities**

Lawler (2008) states that the task of defining identity is an impossible one, particularly as identity can be negotiated both in terms of similarity and difference, making our identities both dynamic and durable (Hopkins, 2010). For young people, identities can be considered transitory, or a state of ‘becoming’ future selves (Worth, 2009) which may take circuitous, non-linear pathways into adulthood (Valentine, 2003). Identities are formed relationally, in that they rely on being formed through not being the same as another identity. While identities may be thought to be individualised, they are also socially constructed through social relations and replicated to give them agency (Hopkins, 2010). Anderson (2010) argues that youth identities have been produced, and reproduced for

generations, with 'neo-tribal' groups (Maffesoli, 1988) constructing their own particular identities and places in which to express them. Such tribal affiliations are very often experimental, making them ephemeral and transitory points of youth. Malbon (1998) explores the intersections between spaces and identities for young people and suggests that group membership may not necessarily be as important when going out at night as the spatial and cultural contexts of the environments young people choose to socialise in, however fleetingly. Here, it is the performance of identities which becomes important, particularly the ways in which embodied identities are expressed in certain contexts (Butler, 1990) or places take on identities through their associations with certain practices (Goffman, 1959). Hence 'locating' identities emphasises the fluidity of identities and how they are created and expressed strategically, and in relation to others (Gabriel, 2006; Easthope and Gabriel, 2008; Worth, 2009; Lobo, 2013).

### **Student's night-time social spaces**

Discourses of the 'student experience' have gained prevalence in recent years (Chow and Healey, 2008), with research emphasising the importance of student-centric night-time social spaces (such as the Students' Union and other bars and nightclubs) in generating bonds and attachments during term-time (Holt and Griffin, 2005; Hubbard, 2013). Chatterton (1999) suggests that students often use these social bonds as mechanisms with which to self-segregate away from other non-students, creating 'exclusive geographies'. Holt and Griffin (2005) and Chatterton and Hollands (2003) point out that this process of appropriating night-time social spaces is primarily espoused through specific popular culture infrastructure directed specifically at the student market, such as student-only nights in pubs and nightclubs in the city; tiered entrance fees or targeted marketing strategies aimed at excluding – or at the very least discouraging non-students. In many ways these separated student spaces represent the 'divided city' and may exacerbate the potential for resentment and conflict from local, non-students (see:

Holdsworth, 2009a; Bancroft, 2012; Wilkinson, 2015). This is particularly relevant as mainstream student nights have been observed by some as reinforcing many of the uncivilised discourses associated with student behaviour, which promote “hedonistic pleasure-seeking, drinking and sex/coupling” (Hubbard, 2013, p. 267). Andersson *et al.* (2012) offer a counterpoint to these notions of solidarity, arguing that such student-centric spaces can become sites of marginalisation if certain groups are prevented from participating in activities. They employ Massey’s (2005, p. 151) concept of ‘throwntogetherness’ – “the chance that space may set us down next to the unexpected neighbour” – to highlight how the seemingly heterogeneous ‘student life’ can become inaccessible for those who do not fit a pre-defined ‘student identity’ (see also: Taulke-Johnson, 2008; Holdsworth, 2009a; Fincher and Shaw, 2009; Jones, 2014). Moreover, linking such discourses to the above notions of self-segregation highlights the potential for issues of position and privilege which favour the dominant social group – often white, middle-class, heterosexual and secular – defined by Andersson *et al.* (2012) as ‘campus insiders’, with more marginal groups positioned as ‘other’. This homogeneity may deem certain social environments, such as Students’ Unions, inappropriate spaces for non-heterosexual (Taulke-Johnson, 2008) or non-drinking (Andersson *et al.*, 2012) cultures.

In developing these linkages between night-time social spaces and identity formation, there has, so far, been very little discussion of how students’ tastes for night-time social activities may begin to evolve beyond these spaces over the duration of the degree (see Hollands, 1995; 2002 for notable exceptions). Exploring how students make sense of the student and non-student elements of their term-time location during their time at University will provide the main focus of this paper. This will be achieved by exploring the linkages between identity and the spaces in which these identities are performed as they progress through their degrees.

## **Methodology**

The data for this paper were collected as part of a wider research project focusing upon the ways in which undergraduates from the University of Portsmouth established a 'sense of place' in their term-time University location (see Holton and Riley, 2014). Thirty one 'walking interviews' were conducted with full time undergraduate students during the spring/summer of 2012 and willing participants were recruited through a web-based survey. The students were accompanied on self-directed walks around the city, each lasting approximately an hour-and-a-half. The participants were encouraged to choose two to three locations within Portsmouth which they visited regularly and represented their student identities (e.g. places where they socialised at night, went shopping, ate out, or met with friends to study, as well as tourist spots or communal spaces, such as the seafront or local parks)<sup>2</sup>. The self-directed nature of the routes meant they replicated, as much as possible, 'natural', every day journeys (Kusenbach, 2003). For ethical and practical reasons, the walking interviews were conducted during the day, meaning discussions of the night-time activities were occasionally taken out of their temporal context. Nevertheless, the place-based nature of the encounters was highly evocative, encouraging the participants to provide some very deeply contextual narratives of their night-time activities. These reflexive encounters moved well beyond simple recall to encompass the participants' broader connections with their term-time location. Interviews were audio recorded using a handheld voice recorder carried by the participant to give them greater control over the direction of the journey. The audio data were transcribed and analysed using the computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package Atlas.ti.

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<sup>2</sup> The UK's only island city, Portsmouth has a population of 197,614 with a population density of, on average 5000 people per km<sup>2</sup>, making it the UK's most densely populated city by area outside of London. Portsmouth has a large youth population with 33.6 percent under 25, three per cent higher than the national average (PCC, 2012), reflecting Portsmouth's large student population. In 2012-13 The University of Portsmouth had 22,709 students constituting eleven percent of the city's population, comprising: 18,878 (83 percent) full time and 3,831 (17 percent) part time students, with 18,889 (83 percent) undergraduates and 3,217 (17 percent) postgraduates.



The demographic representation of the participants reveals that the sample leans towards being young (68 per cent), female (65 per cent), white and British (both 90 per cent). Whilst this does not by any means constitute an evenly represented sample, the distribution here does broadly compare with that of the composition of the University of Portsmouth in 2012. Crucially, the year groups are fairly evenly represented with around a third from each. Eighteen of the participants had left home to live in term-time student accommodation at the time of the interviews, with 12 living a commutable distance from home; four had left their home region for University while the final two participants were international students. For the remaining 13 students that were living with parents or in their own homes, all of them considered themselves to be 'local' students, even though some were living up to 15 kilometres from the city. Recognising such [im]mobilities is important as they can be indicative of how students negotiate relationships and connections with their term-time locations (Holdsworth, 2006; 2009; Holton, 2015a; 2015b) and reflects the relatively local mobility patterns discussed by Duke-Williams (2009b) and Holdsworth (2009b).

### **The student bubble**

As suggested earlier, this notion of the student bubble can be interpreted through the lens of 'activity space' (Hägerstrand, 1970; Golledge and Stimson, 1997). While many of the participants alluded to the student bubble as being homogenous, further investigation reveals complex and hierarchical interconnections between the activities these participants were involved in (e.g. interacting during lectures, in the library, halls of residences or on campus etc.) and how these often became interlaced with night-time social interactions:

"I live in [hall] right on Guildhall Walk which is right on the doorstep. You've got everything, Wetherspoons on the corner, the Union, everything revolves around that small space" (David, Y1).

“Sometimes we’ll meet here [the library] quite late and do a bit of study, then we might go “let’s take a break” and going for a pint in the Union or back to someone’s hall to watch a movie or something. It’s all pretty laidback” (Peter, Y1).

These comments suggest a perceived fluidity between learning, living and social environments for first year students in which identities can be developed and performed in safety. While halls of residences have been viewed as highly significant in the emergence of student identities (Hubbard, 2009), the narrow geographies based around first year accommodation, socialising and studying appear to intensify the student experience and make social interactions less complicated. Importantly, the spaces themselves are crucial in developing student identities as they provide context to young, experimental identities (Malbon, 1998). Holt and Griffin (2005) highlight the territorialisation of such neo-tribal behaviours by suggesting that students quickly learn to appropriate certain night-time environments as their own and develop their own tactics for excluding non-students through their attendance of student-only nights. These notions of self-segregation and the appropriation of space were evident among the research cohort being studied here with almost all participants living in student accommodation discussing how they actively disengaged from the local non-student population at night:

“I guess a lot of things are separated from locals like student nights, you’re not allowed in them if you’re not a student so that separates us from locals. The fact that we are so concentrated as students, the locals don’t really get a chance” (Ben, Y1).

“Student nights have a great atmosphere because we are all like here for three years and you don’t want to upset anyone, you’re friendly, you have more in common with these people. Whereas the local people, they’re lovely, I cannot say a bad word about them, I’ve never had a really bad experience but I have had

moments where I've been in places on a Saturday night where I feel that it's a little bit rough, I'm a little bit on edge" (Rory, Y1).

While these findings align with Holt and Griffin's (2005) labelling of *our* spaces and *their* spaces, the responses above suggest temporal and spatial hierarchies may be formulated which place the students above their non-student counterparts. Borrowing from Lefebvre (1991), this domination of space, albeit seasonally, by students reconfigures the night-scape according to their particular needs. This implies a delineation between student and non-student spaces, with students using both their territorialised behaviour, and the structures put in place by University managers and club owners, to demarcate space for their exclusive use. Naturally, University students are not the principle group within University towns and cities (in Portsmouth, undergraduate students constitute only eleven per cent of the overall population), but their seasonality and concentration adjacent to the University, such as the Guildhall area and parts of Fratton and Southsea, can be enough to give them a visible presence within the city during term time. Crucial to this is the conspicuous branding of student nights in Freshers<sup>3</sup> bars and nightclubs. Student club-night promoters, such as Eskimo11, have been in existence in Portsmouth since 2008 and have made their presence felt widely across many Portsmouth nightspots, assisting with providing safer social environments for students across multiple days of the week. In the context of this analysis, the involvement of these promoters create places in which first year students may perceive it important to be seen and which project certain images of solidarity. Students obviously do not all move in exactly the same social spheres according to their year group, yet the territorialisation of social spaces discussed by the participants appears to perpetuate Chatterton's (1999) notions of exclusive geographies. Moreover, these first year activity spaces are also generally considered the most appropriate

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<sup>3</sup> 'Fresher' or 'freshman' derives from the British or American term for a first year University student.

environments for new undergraduates to socialise as they contain many of the right ingredients useful for first year students to establish a 'Fresher' identity and to fit in quickly among their peers.

### **Moving on - opening up the city**

Once students had left the first year, they often began to 'unlearn the rules of the student game' (Chatterton, 1999, p. 122). This was expressed through their adapting activity spaces, whereby the second and third year participants sought out alternative social spaces within which to hone and personalise their student identities beyond the more traditional student-centric spaces. For those living in student accommodation, this broadening of the students' 'geographies' of Portsmouth corresponded with their moving into other residential parts of the city and was expressed as a desire to establish a stronger and more expansive attachment to their term-time location away from the more typical Freshers' environments. This develops previous literature by suggesting that these alternative social environments are constitutive of, what may be termed as 'quasi [non]student' spaces – defined here as night-time social spaces, often run by student-friendly promoters, in which students can socialise inconspicuously among non-students whilst remaining in the relative security of their peers. This aligns with Giddens' (1991) notion of lifestyle, through which certain behaviours and practices "give material form to a particular [individualised] narrative of self-identity" (p. 81). Here, these participants were considering their lifestyle changes – in the main – through the transition from halls to rented housing and reflected their progression away from their 'Freshers' identities'. This was evident within the walking interviews when the participants chose to visit social locations, often away from the more traditional Freshers nights, which better suited their evolving social identities:

‘My fiancé’s friend plays in a band so we’ll go to places when they’re playing, lots of open mike nights and we find new places doing that and they’re often less typically studenty [sic] pubs’ (Kay, Y2).

‘Tomorrow I’m going to The Barn [underground music venue], I’ve never heard of where that is but we’ll find out when we get there, which is a bit better because we don’t know what the night is going to be like’ (Tim, Y2).

‘[...] over there [Students’ Union] you’ve got the ‘University of Portsmouth’ in big black letters and you’ve got the Union written there and everyone naturally associates the Union with students. I’d say the Registry [pub opposite] is a little less obvious, fewer people know about it and what goes on there’ (Paul, Y2).

These accounts demonstrate how such quasi [non]student spaces may be important in transgressing the traditional student/non-student binary which has been defined previously (see: Chatterton, 1999; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Holt and Griffin, 2005; Wattis, 2013). This was evident in the ease of movement between seemingly student and non-student spaces while walking around the city and the ways in which this opened up the city for them. This extends the suggestion that students in their second and third year: “start to explore city life more in terms of their musical tastes, peer group interests and youth cultural identity” (Hollands, 1995, p. 31). In a sense, the participants expressed a form of ‘stylistic non-conformity’ (Weber, 1999) in which they were keen to experiment with alternative identities but in carefully managed social spaces. These quasi [non]student nights are often managed by student promoters, or have inconspicuous links to Students’ Unions meaning users can socialise in ‘local’ spaces whilst remaining in the security and comfort of their peer group. Importantly, the findings from this research highlight how these spaces need not be located far from the traditional Freshers social spaces (interestingly, none of the participants mentioned using (or having access to) private vehicles to visit

places further away from the city). Overlaps are present between the student-centric and quasi [non]student spaces in Portsmouth which differ from Chatterton's (1999) research location in Bristol, in which the student and non-student spaces were clearly delineated. Hence these quasi [non]student spaces highlight the heterogeneity of students' activity spaces by providing a social stimulus which suits the tastes of the student, rather than necessitating a need to 'fit in' with the more mainstream activities.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the interview participants who sought out quasi [non]student spaces exhibited few signs of being interested in making meaningful connections with the non-students who frequented them:

'I don't really know any non-student people in Portsmouth. [...] I have met some locals but no, they haven't become friends' (Lisa, Y3).

'My housemate, her boyfriend isn't a student. He lives in Portsmouth and he's got his group of friends so I go along with her for moral support and whatever. So I do have a small, like group of acquaintances who are non-students but I wouldn't really class them as friends. We do go out occasionally or go to house parties but I wouldn't opt to go out with them, if I wasn't invited by my housemate' (Claire, Y2).

As these comments imply, inclusion within quasi [non]student spaces is not necessarily equal to integrating within the local community for many of the students within the study. Instead, this is more about making use of specific *elements* of these spaces which may afford students opportunities to establish more nuanced attachments to place within their term-time location. While this concurs with Hollands' (1995) and Chatterton's (1999) proposals that students 'un-learn' previously learned behaviours as they move between year groups, the participants' behaviours suggest that they might in fact have been learning the rules to a *different* game entirely, a game which enable them to renegotiate their former first year identities and contrast them against the ones they began to form in

later years. The following quotes demonstrate how this transformation from the more homogenous first year social spaces over to these quasi [non]student spaces may be indicative of keenness among some students to reject their Fresher identities:

‘I think it’s easy to be in a student bubble. It definitely was last year, only talking to students, only doing student things and it’s quite nice to know the city beyond that, a typical student life is actually quite limited with the things you do’ (Kay, Y2).

‘I think it is nice being in a local place rather than just being in a place which is exclusively for students. I like having a mix of people, I might start chatting to someone. It’s nice to chat to someone who isn’t a student sometimes’ (Lisa, Y3).

What these comments hint at is that, rather than falling into step with their year group – as with the more homogenous ‘student bubble’ of first year, activity spaces become more distinctive as students progress into subsequent years. This is particularly important as Axhausen (2007) argues that a person’s activity spaces changes according to the selectivity of their social networks, yet as these comments imply, among the participants, this may also be through increased knowledge and experimentation. As Anderson (2010) suggests, youthful identities are liminal and, in the case of these interviewees, highly individualised as they experience differently their transitions through University, particularly as these identities are formed in relation to the myriad of influential ‘characters’ in their lives (e.g. peers, parents or those in authority etc.) (Valentine, 2003). While the students in their first year were relating their identities to non-students, this became more complex as they moved into subsequent years. By expanding their activity spaces to other, more alternative social spaces, the participants were also establishing identities in relation to *other* students. It would, of course, be naive to assume that these types of behaviours are unique to students – adapting and developing social tastes are common traits among all young people. What is important here is that, for many of these young adults, they are

living away from home, often for the first time, and are developing their tastes away from their established peer group and in locations, often incongruent to their non-student familial homes. Hence, while Gabriel (2006) suggests that mobility makes students' identities unstable through the action of leaving for (and returning from) University, this analysis nuances this further by suggesting iterative process of leaving and returning during and between term-time makes these transformations more complex and individual.

### **Local students - moving differently through the 'student game'**

Related to the experiences of the more 'typical' students living in student accommodation who had left home to go to University were those who were living at home, either with parents, partners or spouses – termed here 'local' students (after Holdsworth, 2009a). For these students, living at home may present interesting challenges when considering accessing social activities (e.g. through differences in age, responsibilities and proximities to the city centre etc.) and highlights the nuanced complexities of the 'student experience'. In this sense, Holdsworth (2009a) argues that local students may struggle to reconcile their student and non-student identities because they often exist between two-worlds:

"I think they [student friends] want to stay in the city where things are more obviously happening. I have introduced them to one friend from home and it is strange when you combine the two because they're talking about two very different worlds, and there was almost a bit of a divide because they kept talking about university and I had to keep encouraging them to talk about other things because of my friend who didn't go to university. It's very easy to stick to what you know I think" (Helen, Y2).

Helen's experience emphasises the complications faced by local students when trying to draw together the potentially incompatible aspects of their student and non-student identities. This notion of 'two worlds' was present in all the interviews and appeared to be



the case no matter what year group the participants were in (see also: Holdsworth, 2009a; Holton, 2015b). In the context of the previous discussions of neo-tribalism, Helen's comment implies that local students may experience complications trying to mix 'old' non-student identities with their 'new' student ones, meaning they may have to manage separate social groupings to maintain equilibrium. Nevertheless, some of the participants indicated ways in which they managed to ameliorate these differences. The following contrasting accounts by Nina and Sarah, both mature students<sup>4</sup> who live outside of the city, indicate the complexities of negotiating their identities:

"It's funny, I feel like when I'm here [at University] as a student I'm a visitor. I feel different when I come here at the weekend which is why I picked two places which I go to at night. For me this [the Fleet pub] represents me being a student whereas Gunwharf [Quays] represents me being me, away from Uni [sic] because I use different places with different people" (Nina, Y2).

"If we [husband] are out in Portsmouth we come here, the Albert Road area rather than the Gunwharf area, it's all a bit posey [sic]. I mean, it's a bit more relaxed, laid back here [in Albert Road], whereas if you go out on the other side of town around Gunwharf its too studenty [sic]" (Sarah, Y1).

These contrasting interpretations of Portsmouth's night-spots (particularly Gunwharf Quays, which is identified here as both a student (Sarah) and non-student (Nina) location) reinforce the heterogeneity of students' activity spaces, and highlights the importance of their perceptions of what such spaces represent through certain activities which are performed there. Hence, it may not necessarily be as clear cut as the spaces themselves which produce student identities, more-so the activities and perceptions of what these activities might offer which influence the ways in which students' night-time identities are

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<sup>4</sup> In the UK context, mature students can constitute anyone over the age of 21.

performed.

Nevertheless, by designating contrasting identities to specific places within the city, Nina and Sarah's comments emphasise how the flexibility of student identities can be just as prevalent for those who elect to remain local during term-time (Holton, 2015c). These students' have clearly thought carefully about how their identities might be expressed to fit different social situations. While this aligns with Malbon's (1999) notion of moving between social groups, this was enacted more to stabilise their identities rather than experiment with more fleeting attachments (Anderson, 2010). Borrowing Worth's (2009) notion of transitional identities, the action of relating identities to places allows Nina and Sarah to draw upon specific elements of the Self which provide both a mechanism for 'fitting in' among various peer groups but also affords opportunities to move both within and between social groups and constructing stronger place attachments within each of these locations.

That said, some of the local participants, while maintaining distinctions between their student and non-student activity spaces, occasionally bridged the gap by introducing their fellow students to non-student nights out, presenting opportunities to expose their friends to the world outside of the student bubble:

"Tiger's student night is on a Monday but on a Thursday they'd [student friends] all go to Liquid and I despise that. In first year and more towards the second half of second year I recommended we go to Tiger on a Thursday night because that's when I go and it's my favourite night and they've started doing that now and they're more welcoming to it, at first they were like "why would we do that?" It just mixes it up a little, although it's the same place there's a lot of different people for the university people because obviously there are a lot of the home people that go on a Thursday" (Dawn, Y3).

While there may be differences in the ways in which local and non-local students manage their night-time activity spaces, Dawn's comment implies that local students' knowledge of spaces beyond the student bubble hold a great deal of currency in facilitating more experimental nights out for non-local students. This research cannot suggest that all encounters with non-student socialising are led primarily through the knowledge of local students, but it can certainly problematise the exclusivity of student socialising (Chatterton, 1999), particularly the fluidity between the types of interactions which might occur.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, by exploring students' activity spaces this paper has examined the complexities of [re]negotiating student identities for undergraduates as they progress through HE and how this notion of the transitory social experiences of students adds to notions of youth and HE transitions. Consistent with Holdsworth and Morgan (2005), this research has sought to look *between* the points at which students commence and conclude their University experience in order to gain a clearer understanding of how these processes might take place. This was achieved through an examination of how students might link identities with night-time social activities within their term-time location and how these associations adapt in line with subsequent reconfigurations of students' activity spaces. This adds to discussions of youth transitions by suggesting that the more typical activity spaces associated with being Freshers might constitute a 'student bubble'. While this may be useful in setting the tone for many undergraduates, this may be considered homogenous and not necessarily befitting of the evolving or 'maturing' social identities of all students. Recognising how the spaces in which students interact may affect identity performances extends Chatterton's (1999) and Holt and Griffin's (2005) suggestions that first year students seek collective identities in order to develop safe social spaces away from other non-students by suggesting that students may begin to exhibit more individualised dynamic agency in expressing their social behaviours.

Moreover, by examining the different year groups and the participants' contrasting mobilities, this analysis has also established the importance of recognising both the relational and transformative qualities of the student identity. This research is, of course, not trying to imply that all students fall into step with their year group, and, in line with other investigations of youthful activity spaces (e.g. Villanueva et al., 2012), the students' agency of mobility made them flexible in moving beyond their expected 'buffers'. That said, there were certainly tendencies for the year groups within the study to follow the patterns of mobility suggested in the analysis. Hence, while Gabriel (2006) discussed the difficulties faced by graduates returning home from University in articulating their student identities, this research has revealed the intricacies faced by undergraduates during University as they [re]negotiate their adapting identities. It is important to recognise that, far from being homogenous – as the rhetoric might suggest (Holdsworth, 2009a), these identities are heterogeneous, being influenced by a myriad of factors (e.g. activity spaces and how their location, fashions and tastes year of study etc.). What is crucial here is that these identities were at once embodied *and* spatialised *and* performed strategically in order to gain acceptance or social recognition among peers (Butler, 1990; Malbon, 1998; Worth, 2009). Hence, the student identity is not simply a discrete 'phase' for young people, but an intricate collection of different identities which adapt as students' appreciation of their term-time location changes and they are introduced to new spaces and ways of socialising.

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